

Six Late Roman Medallions in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection

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In 1958 the late Alfred R. Bellinger published the forty-six Roman and Byzantine medallions—numismatists usually now prefer to call them multiples—then in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection, with a further one of Phocas, unfortunately a forgery, from the Whittemore Collection in the Fogg Art Museum at Harvard.¹ Another multiple, a 1½ solidus piece of Valens minted at Antioch, which was already at Dumbarton Oaks but which Bellinger had overlooked, was included by him in a subsequent article on the fourth-century gold and silver coins in the collection, which he published in association with P. Bruun, J. P. C. Kent, and C. H. V. Sutherland.² A few other medallions have been acquired since, and although the types of none of them are new, it is desirable to make the existence of the specimens here known to scholars. Two of them, however—a unique double solidus of Theodosius II and an aureus (1/60 lb), also unique, of Leo I—were included in Melinda Mays' and my volume on the coinage of the fifth century.³ The remaining six are described here (Fig. 1). The medallions, in chronological order of issue, are as follows:

1. Constantine the Great. Double solidus (321)
2. Constantine the Great. Double solidus (324)
3. Constans. Four-argenteus piece (338)
4. Constantine II. Double solidus (351/4)
5. Valens. Double solidus (375)
6. Theodosius II. Aureus (1/60 lb) (403?)

All are of gold except no. 3, which is of silver. *RIC* in the references is the standard abbreviation for *Roman Imperial Coinage*, initiated by Harold Mattingly and E. A. Syden-

¹A. R. Bellinger, "Roman and Byzantine Medallions in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection," *DOP* 12 (1958), 125–56. The authenticity of the Phocas medallion was accepted in *DOC* II, 161, no. 21, but Cécile Morrisson has called my attention to an article by A. Sorlin Dorigny, writing from Istanbul, that reproduces a specimen and describes how some twenty were struck in 1870 by an Armenian employee of the Ottoman imperial mint, the design being simply an enlargement of one of Phocas' *siliquae*. See A. Sorlin Dorigny, "Monnaies et bulles inédites de l'empereur Phocas," *RA*, 2nd ser., 42 (1881), 86–91, at p. 89.

²A. R. Bellinger et al., "Late Roman Gold and Silver Coins at Dumbarton Oaks: Diocletian to Eugenius," *DOP* 18 (1964), 221, no. 226.

³P. Grierson and M. Mays, *Catalogue of Late Roman Coins in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection and in the Whittemore Collection: From Arcadius and Honorius to the Accession of Anastasius* (Washington, D.C., 1992), nos. 377, 515.

ham (London, 1923–94). The volumes referred to here are VII (1966) by P. Bruun; VIII (1981) by J. P. C. Kent; IX (1951) by J. W. E. Pearce; and X (1994) by J. P. C. Kent. The other works used for reference are as follows:

Gnecchi: Francesco Gnecchi, *I medaglioni romani*, I, *Oro ed argento* (Milan, 1912; reprinted, Bologna, 1968).

Hendy: Michael F. Hendy, *Studies in the Byzantine Monetary Economy, c. 300–1450* (Cambridge, 1985).

Toynbee: Jocelyn M. C. Toynbee, *Roman Medallions*, Numismatic Studies 5 (New York, 1944; reprinted with an introduction [and updated bibliography] by William E. Metcalf, New York, 1986).

1. CONSTANTINE I (Augustus 306–337). Double Solidus. Sirmium, January 321

Obv. D(ominus) N(oster) CONSTANINVS MAX(imus) AVG(ustus). Bust of Constantine in profile left, wearing cuirass and paludamentum, raising his right hand in salutation and holding a globe in his left. On his head, a radiate crown and a diadem of which only the tails are shown.

Rev. CRISPVS ET CONSTANTINVS NOB(ilissimi) CAESS (= Caesares) COSS (= consules) II. Busts of Crispus (on left) and Constantine II (on right) facing each other, each wearing consular robes. Crispus holds an eagle-headed scepter in his right hand and an orb in his left, Constantine the same objects but in left and right hand respectively. Beneath, SIRM.

8.86 g, 26 mm. Die axis 180°. Not in *RIC*, but cf. VII, 470, no. 18. Mounted in a large, hexagonal, openwork gold pendant frame of the fourth century A.D. Acc. no. 75.6. Sold at Christie's (London), 19 October 1970, lot 197, and purchased by a Netherlands dealer, Mrs. Kring. By December 1974 it was in the hands of a London dealer, Richard Falkiner, from whom it was purchased by Dumbarton Oaks. There were two other specimens from the same dies in the sale, both in circular frames; one (lot 198) is now in the British Museum, the other (lot 199) in the Louvre.

The figures depicted on the medallion are Constantine himself, his eldest son Crispus, whom he had by his mistress Minervina, and Constantine II, the eldest of his three sons by his wife Fausta, whom he married for dynastic reasons in 307. Crispus and Constantine II were both made Caesars in 316; the fact that Crispus is depicted larger than his half-brother is presumably intended to reflect the thirteen-year difference in their ages.

The medallion was struck in January 321, when Crispus and Constantine were inaugurated joint consuls for the second time. The obverse and reverse types are both remarkable. On the obverse, the most striking features are Constantine's radiate crown, marking the emperor's assimilation to the sun-god Apollo, and his raised right hand, turned outwards toward the spectators. The crown had been the traditional mark of a double denomination, in particular the dupondius, or double *as*, and the antoninianus, or double denarius, and so might be regarded as appropriate for a double solidus. But the basic reason for its use on Constantine's coins was a dynastic devotion to the sun-god, traces of which lingered on into the early 320s, despite his conversion to Christianity.



1



2



3



4



5



6



1 (x2)



2 (x2)



3 (x2)

The gesture, intended to show the sun repelling the powers of darkness, is one particularly associated with images of Sol. The title “maximus,” conferred on Constantine by the Roman Senate after the defeat of Maxentius and the “liberation” of Rome in 312, is used on much but by no means all of his subsequent coinage. This medallion and the next are only two examples of the gold medallions and coins struck in great variety and volume at Sirmium during the years 320 to 326. This city served virtually as Constantine’s capital between 320 and 324, when he moved to Thessalonica in preparation for the campaign against his co-emperor, Licinius, that was to make him sole master of the Roman world.

This medallion and no. 2 are two of four that had been mounted and formed part of a treasure of jewelry and late-fourth-century gold solidi that were sold together in the Christie’s sale noted above, lots 184–202. They are said to have been found together at Sidi-bu-Saïd, in Cyrenaica (Libya), in 1967, but since some of the jewelry seems to have been shown in western Europe two years previously, the provenance is open to doubt. The coins have been carefully described,⁴ but the medallions only in the context of the jewelry, most fully in an account of the companion piece to this medallion in the Louvre.⁵ A fifth medallion—corresponding in type to no. 2 below, but from different dies and of the mint of Nicomedia (SMN), and enclosed in a similar octagonal frame—was acquired in 1994 by the Cleveland Museum of Art. Whether it once formed part of the same hoard is unknown.

2. CONSTANTINE I (Augustus 307–336). Double Solidus. Sirmium, January 324

Obv. As medallion no. 1, but with a somewhat different portrait; each quarter of the globe held by the emperor is marked with a pellet.

Rev. As no. 1, but the inscription reads with a more correct plural NOBB, instead of NOB, and ends III, instead of II, i.e., the third rather than second consulship; also, the scepters are crossed instead of being held vertically, and each globe is replaced by a large circular ornament on the boys’ robes.

8.86 g, 24 mm. Die axis 180°. Not in *RIC*; Hendy, pl. 3.1 (this coin). Mounted in a large, circular, openwork gold pendant frame of the same general pattern and date as the last. Acc. no. 70.37. Bought at the same Christie’s sale as medallion no. 1, lot 200.

This medallion is basically of the same type as no. 1, but dated to the third consulate of the two brothers (324). The obverse type is the same as the other medallion, but the die-sinker shows the emperor’s uplifted hand frontally, and not sideways as on the earlier die. On the reverse, the die-sinker has adopted the device of crossing the scepters, but he has transmuted the globes held by the boys into two large globules on their robes, these apparently taking the place of the pellets on either side of SIRM, which distinguish other coins struck at this mint in 324. These details are the same on the Cleveland Mu-

⁴N. Dürr and Pierre Bastien, “Trésor de solidi (353–388),” *RSN* 63 (1984), 205–40.

⁵Noël Duval, “Un grand médaillon monétaire du IV^e siècle,” *La Revue du Louvre* 23 (1973), 367–74. See also D. Buckton, “Byzantine coin-set pendant, AD 324–88,” *National Art Collections Fund Review* (1985), 93, for the British Museum pendant.

seum specimen, but most of the reverse inscription on this is concealed by the frame, and one cannot be certain of their being the same date.

This is the only known specimen of a medallion of Crispus and Constantine II dated to the third consulship, although there is a solidus of Crispus alone with the inscription *FELIX PROCESSVS COS III* of this date (*RIC* VII, 473, no. 43). A medallion of Antioch of this type, however, came to light in a hoard found in the Balkans at Borča early in this century, but while it has the crossed scepters it is dated to their second consulship.⁶ Its existence presents something of a problem, since in 321 Antioch was not in Constantine's dominions, and the solidus, to which the weight of the medallion is adjusted, was not introduced at that mint until after the defeat of Licinius. It seems likely that it was produced in late 324, when the mint passed into Constantine's hands and took as its models a mixed assortment of earlier medallions and coins brought from Sirmium, though by that time the inscription *COS II* was no longer correct.

A curious feature of this medallion is that the princes are shown appreciably younger than they are on no. 1, although they were really three years older. The reason is presumably that Constantine II, only five years old in 321, had to be made older than he was, while at eight he could be shown as his real age. Crispus was born in 303, and so was much older.

3. *CONSTANS* (Augustus 337–350). Silver. Half-Ounce Medallion (4 argentei). Siscia, 338

Obv. *FL(avius) IVL(ius) CONSTANS P(ius) F(elix) AVG(ustus)*. Bust of Constans in profile right, wearing a diadem of square plaques separated by laurel leaves and a paludamentum over cuirass, seen partly frontally, with upper part of shield to right.

Rev. *FELICITAS PERPETVA*. Three sons of Constantine seated facing on low thrones, each wearing belted tunic and chlamys. Constantine II is in center, larger than the others and slightly in front of them, nimbate, and raising right hand in gesture of benediction; Constantius II is on the left and Constans on the right, equal in size, and wearing a diadem and looking at him and each holding a scroll in his right hand. On a footstool below Constantine's throne, *VOT(is) ·V·*; in exergue, *SIS* and crescent with pellet above.

13.44 g, 37 mm. Die axis 180°. *RIC* VIII 352, no. 41. Acc. no. 67.21.

This elaborate medallion was apparently struck by Constans only, at the mint of Siscia. Two other specimens are known, in Berlin and Paris, the former illustrated in Gnecchi, I, pl. 30.2, and the reverse of the latter by Grabar.⁷ All three are from different dies. There is also a gold aureus at Paris of identical design (*RIC* VIII, 350, no. 18; illus. Toynbee, pl. III.7), but with *SIS* followed by a star instead of a crescent and pellet.

The medallions must have been struck after the death of Constantine the Great (22

⁶*RIC* VII, 682, no. 37; illustrated in G. Elmer, "Ein Fund römischer Goldmünzen aus Borča," *NZ* 63 (1930), 42–3, no. 15; pl. II.6.

⁷A. Grabar, *The Beginnings of Christian Art, 200–395* (London, 1966), 193, fig. 208. It is described in the caption (p. 323) as a gold medallion, and colored as such in the illustration, but Mme. Morrisson informs me that it is in fact silver, like those in Berlin and at Dumbarton Oaks. Nor is the central figure Constantine I, as Grabar supposed.

May 337) and before January 339, when Constantius and Constans became joint consuls, since neither of them wears consular robes. The probable occasion (see Toynbee, p. 199) was the meeting of the three brothers at Viminacium—the modern Kostolac on the Danube some fifty miles east of Belgrade—in the early summer of 338, when they carried through their final partition of the empire, and Constans was confirmed in his possession of Italy, Africa, and most of the Balkans.

This medallion recognizes the seniority of Constantine II by representing him nimbate and larger than his brothers. A double solidus of Constans of similar type from Thessalonica, now in Paris (*RIC* VIII, 403, no. 18; Gneecchi, pl. 9. 11), shows the brothers seated on a joint throne with high back, equal in size, and all facing, but Constantine II is not nimbate. It must have been struck later in the year, or possibly even after January 339, because the younger brothers wear what has been claimed to be consular costume, although the poor condition of the specimen does not permit certainty about this. What is clear is that the eighteen-year-old Constans was beginning to lose patience with the pretensions to superiority of his elder brother Constantine II, an attitude that not much more than a year later led to open war between them and to Constantine's death.

The costumes of the brothers are described by Toynbee as "liturgical," but all that one can say is that they are neither military nor consular, and are clearly of great magnificence. The tunic of each is fastened by a belt of large roundels, probably gold medallions like those of the Kyrenia girdle in the Metropolitan Museum.⁸ Constantine II's gesture is one that was initially one of speech, but had become, as it remains in the Western Church today, that of benediction. Each brother holds the border of his chlamys in his left hand, and each of the younger ones holds a scroll, the traditional symbol of magistracy, in his right. Kent, in *RIC* VIII, describes it as a mappa, but the medallion is not consular in character, and although the object is not very clear, a scroll seems more likely.

4. CONSTANTIUS II (Augustus 337–361). Gold. Double solidus. Thessalonica, 351/4

Obv. FLA(vius) IVL(ius) CONSTANTIVS PERP(etuus) AVG(ustus). Bust of Constantius II in profile left, wearing pearl diadem and paludamentum over cuirass.

Rev. GLORIA ROMANORVM. Roma and Constantinopolis seated, Roma on a low throne facing, Constantinopolis on a high-backed throne turning left, with her foot on a prow. Roma wears a crested helmet and a long, belted tunic draped so as to leave her right leg and high boot uncovered; she holds in her right hand a globe surmounted by a Victory and in her left a spear. Constantinopolis wears a turreted crown and a similar costume, but her legs are covered; she holds in her right hand a globe surmounted by a Victory, and in her left a long scepter with a knob below and two knobs above. In exergue, ·TES·

8.70 g, 27 mm. Acc. no. 59.7 (gift of George Zacos). Unpublished, but *RIC* VIII, 416, no. 413 (and Gneecchi, I.30, no. 20) is the companion piece of Gallus (351–54).

The representations of Roma and Constantinopolis on this medallion are much finer than the slightly earlier ones on the huge issue of solidi struck for Constantius II's vicennalia in 348, where the two figures have to hold between them a shield with a *vota* inscrip-

⁸P. Grierson, "The Kyrenia Girdle of Byzantine Medallions and Solidi," *NC*, 6th ser., 15 (1955), 55–70.

tion. The inferior position of Constantinopolis, representing the second imperial capital, is emphasized in a number of ways: she is on the spectator's right, so that Roma sits in the place of honor; she is smaller and in profile; and she is shown gazing admiringly upwards at her dominant and aggressive military partner, whose right leg, bare to the knee, is thrust forward, so that she can rest upon it the huge globe that she grasps in grotesquely thick fingers. Constantinopolis still wears a turreted crown, basically civilian in character, instead of the helmet which on other issues seemed to place her on military equality with her western counterpart.

5. VALENS (364–78). Double solidus. Trier, 375

Obv. D(ominus) N(oster) VALENS P(ius) F(elix) AVG(ustus). Bust of Valens profile right, wearing a rosette diadem and paludamentum over cuirass.

Rev. GLORIA ROMANORVM. Roma and Constantinopolis seated side by side, Roma helmeted and holding in her right hand an orb surmounted by a Victory and in her left a scepter, Constantinopolis turreted, turning toward Roma and with right foot on prow, holding in her right hand an orb surmounted by a Victory and in her left a cornucopia. In exergue, TROBT.

8.92 g, 27 mm. Die axis, 180°. *RIC* IX. -: Hendy, pl. 2.5 Acc. no. 60.57 (gift of Mrs. Bliss), from J. Schulman (Amsterdam) Auction 233 (28.iii.60), lot 1191.

This medallion was previously unknown for Valens, though recorded for Gratian and Valentinian II (*RIC* IX, 21, nos. 36a, b; illustrations in Gnechi, I, pl. 19.5–7) and, with TROBS, for Valentinian I and Gratian (*RIC* IX, 15, nos. 11a, b). The type was thus being struck both before Valentinian I's death (17 November 375) and the elevation of Valentinian II a week later (23 November). This medallion of Valens can best be dated to 375 since there were no medallions or coins of Valentinian II in the hoard from which this comes, one dredged up in April 1958 from the bed of the Moselle between Ahn and Machtum on the Germany-Luxembourg frontier. The coins and medallions were not found immediately but subsequently, when the spillage was emptied, with no trace of receptacle. They were rapidly dispersed, so information about them had to be pieced together by Raymond Weiller, the head of the Cabinet des Médailles in the Grand-Duchy of Luxembourg, after most of the medallions had found their way into public collections.⁹ He estimated the original total at about one hundred pieces, although he could give details of only forty-six. Most were minted at Trier, and Weiller suggests that the whole may have represented a consignment for a *donativum* on the occasion of Gratian's decennalia in 377. The absence of any coins of Valentinian II from the hoard, however, points to a slightly earlier date of burial.

6. THEODOSIUS II (402–50). Aureus (1/60 lb). Constantinople, 403(?)

Obv. D(ominus) N(oster) THEODOSIVS P(ius) F(elix) AVG(ustus). Youthful bust of Theodosius II profile right, wearing diadem and a paludamentum over cuirass.

⁹R. Weiller, "Le trésor d'Ain-Machtum (1958)," *Hémecht* 22 (1970), 73–89. The medallion here is his no. 23, cited and illustrated from the Schulman auction catalogue since he was unaware of the identity of the purchaser.

Rev. VICTORIA ROMANORVM. Victory advancing left holding wreath in right hand and palm in left; in left field, Christogram, and in right, star; in exergue, CONOB.

5.35 g, 24 mm. Die-axis, 180°. Hendy, pl. 3.4; *RIC* X, 256, no. 217. Acc. no. 72.1 (purchased from Münzen und Medaillen AG, Basel).

This medallion, illustrated by Hendy and in *RIC*, in both cases from this specimen, should have been included in *Late Roman Coins* (LRC, see note 3) but was overlooked, having been placed in a medal tray and not with the coins. The reverse and legend are those normal for the denomination (cf. the aureus of Leo I, *LRC*, no. 515). A Constantinopolitan issue with a young bust is known for Arcadius (*LRC*, p. 107: Hermitage, former Tolstoi collection), but there has hitherto been a gap between it and that of Leo I, although ones of Theodosius II and Marcian could be presumed to exist. The star in the field of this coin dates it in or after 403, and the very youthful bust points to it actually being an issue of 403.

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